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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000768

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: UNICEF OFFICIAL DISCUSSES TURKMEN RELUCTANCE TO  
SUBMIT EDUCATION STATISTICS

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: A UNICEF official said that Turkmenistan lacks the motivation to supply education statistics necessary to be considered for Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) funds. In addition, Turkmenistan's gross domestic product per capita income most likely puts it in the middle-income country category, making it ineligible for MCC funds. UNICEF's strategy of including training-of-trainers at the end of government training programs both legitimizes UNICEF's work and adds sustainability. In Turkmenistan, UNICEF focuses on attaining international standards, not "soft issues" like national ideology, curriculum reform, education quality, and human capacity that are serious problems in the country. Post has experienced the same reluctance from the government to provide wide access to educational institutions, and concurs with the interlocutor's opinion that Turkmenistan will not attempt to qualify for Millennium Challenge Corporation funding in the foreseeable future. END SUMMARY.

THE PROBLEM WITH MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE FUNDS AND TURKMENISTAN

12. (C) Deputy Representative of UNICEF's Turkmenistan Office, Abdul Alim (strictly protect throughout), said in a meeting on June 17 that Turkmenistan has no interest in taking advantage of the Millennium Challenge Fund. He believes that officials are reluctant to comply with the Fund's requirement to supply education statistics because the country is in "denial" about the state of education. Also, he said Turkmenistan's issues are not enrollment or completion statistics, but rather the quality of education. UNICEF is concerned about national ideology, for example the Ruhnama, and not numbers, and they are reluctant to let outsiders come in. Soft issues such as curriculum, quality of education, and human capacity are areas that need intervention, which the government views as interference. He added that Turkmenistan's gross domestic product per capita income probably makes it a middle-income country, and that it is on the way to meeting the Millennium Development Goals by 12015.

UNESCO DOES NOT RECEIVE STATISTICS, EITHER

13. (C) Alim said that many professionals from Turkmenistan's education sector have been sent to UNESCO workshops on report writing -- and are always instructed to include statistics in reports -- but that reports instead contain only information on presidential policy and planned reforms. Alim said that "no one has the leverage to get numbers out" of the government because the government has no reason or motivation to release them. His office practices a strategy of integrating training-of-trainers with government training programs, and for example, tacks on an extra day at the end for UNICEF material. He said that this gives UNICEF training legitimacy and encourages sustainability, because the government can repeat the training on its own at a later time if it feels that the program was valuable. Alim said that Turkmen officials and donors have very different expectations regarding results and outcomes from the many training programs provided by donors for government officials. The government views training as a way to reward employees and treats it as a sort of "patronage system," while donors expect long-term results.

#### UNESCO FOCUSES ON INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

14. (C) Alim had just returned from a UNICEF-sponsored trip to the United States with officials from the Ministries of Education, Healthcare and Medical Industry, Economy and Development, and Finance as well as the Institute for Human Rights and Democracy. He said that the study tour -- on "teacher models for child-friendly activities" aimed toward universalizing early childhood development practices in Turkmenistan -- was successful. Alim stated that UNICEF is

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pragmatic regarding expectations on how far UNICEF can press for change in Turkmenistan's education system. He said that UNICEF has the responsibility of persistently discussing international standards with the government, and acknowledged that the UN's status as neutral gives UNICEF leverage to engage with the government in a different way than individual countries can.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: Post,s own contact with the Ministry of Education has shown the same reluctance of sharing information or approving projects that would be extensive or require significant access to schools and universities. Post concurs with this interlocutor's opinion that Turkmenistan will not qualify for Millennium Challenge Corporation funding in the foreseeable future. END COMMENT.

MILES